

Sūrah 87

Al-A'lā

(The Most High)

(Makkan Period)

Title

The expression *al-A'lā* (the Most High) occurring in the *Sūrah*'s opening verse constitutes its title.

Period of Revelation

The *Sūrah*'s contents indicate that it was revealed in the early days of Islam. Verse 6 stating that "Allah will make the Prophet (peace be upon him) recite and then he will not forget" clarifies further that by then he had not mastered the art of assimilating divine revelation. He apprehended forgetfulness on this count. On studying this verse in conjunction with Verses 114 of *Tā Hā* and 16-19 of *al-Qiyāmah*, it emerges that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was reassured not to worry on this count, for Allah would enable him to recite the Qur'ān perfectly so that he would not forget any part of it. After some time, while *Sūrah al-Qiyāmah* was being revealed, the Prophet (peace be upon him) started repeating it. At that stage, Allah instructed him:

(O Prophet), do not stir your tongue hastily (to commit the revelation to memory). Surely it is for Us to have you commit it to memory and to recite it. And so when We recite it, follow its recitation attentively; then it will be for Us to explain it.

(*al-Qiyāmah* 75: 16-19)

Being human, he had the same apprehension at a later date, as 113 verses of *Sūrah Tā Hā* were sent down to him in quick succession. As he tried to memorize these hastily, he was told: "Hasten not with reciting the Qur'ān before its revelation to you is finished," (*Tā Hā* 20: 114). From then on, the Prophet (peace be upon him) never developed this apprehension, for there is no further Qur'ānic directive on this issue.

Subject Matter and Themes

This brief *Sūrah* takes up three themes: (1) The Oneness of Allah. (2) Directives to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and (3) The Hereafter.

The opening verse affirms the doctrine of monotheism that the name of Allah, the Most High be glorified. In other words, He should not be invoked with any such name that smacks of any shortcoming, imperfection, defect or anthropomorphism. All false beliefs have stemmed from some mistaken concept of Allah. As a result, defective names have been ascribed to Him. For sound belief, the first and foremost prerequisite is that He be invoked with reference to His excellent names, which alone befit Him.

Verses 2-4 state that Allah, Lord of mankind, Who deserves to be glorified, has created all things and fashioned them in good proportion. Furthermore, He has determined and guided everything to the objective behind its creation. Man can see for himself that He brings forth pasture from earth and then reduces it into blackish straw. No one other than Allah has the power to occasion spring or to defer autumn.

Verses 6-7 comfort the Prophet (peace be upon him), telling him that he should not feel worried about how to commit the revelation to memory. Allah will make him recite and not let him forget any of

AL-A'LĀ (The Most High)

it. Out of His grace, He will enable him to memorize it. Otherwise, He can make him forget it as well.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) is further told that it is not for him to guide everyone. His assignment consists in only conveying the truth. He should render good counsel to those who are prepared to pay heed to it. He should not pursue the wretched who are indifferent to the truth. Those who fear the dire consequences of error will readily embrace the truth, whereas the wretched will face a terrible end for their rejection.

In the *Sūrah*'s last part, it is stated that only such will prosper who purify themselves in terms of their beliefs, morals and actions and who remember Allah's name in their prayers. However, most people are given to worldly joys and gains. They should better think of the Hereafter. For this life is ephemeral whereas the Life-after-Death is eternal. The bounties of the Hereafter are abiding. These truths are not only embodied in the Qur'ān, but were also spelt out earlier in the Scrolls granted to the Prophets Abraham and Moses (peace be upon them).